



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – 10th Ann. September 11 Ceremony

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
at the 10th Anniversary Ceremony of September 11, Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – September 11, 2011)

The Honorable Ms. Julia Gillard, Prime Minister of Australia and Mr. Tim Mathieson.

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners, of more than 70 nations.

The Honorable Mr. Tony Abbott, Leader of the Opposition

Ms. Katy Gallagher, Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory

General David Hurley, Chief of the Australian Defence Force and Mrs. Linda Hurley

Members of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Chiefs of the Australian Defense Force Services

Senior Members of the Australian Public Service

Members of Australian First Responder Services

And welcome to our visiting international dignitary, the Honourable Mr. Peter MacKay,
Canadian Minister of National Defence

Distinguished guests

Friends and family from many countries.

We come together today to remember a terrible day; but even more to consider the days
that have followed and that will follow.

It has been ten years since September 11.



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The world that we imagined on September 10, 2001 all changed – changed utterly – in 24 hours. That morning of 9/11, thousands of men and women, Americans, Australians, and people of dozens of nationalities, Christians, Jews, Muslims, awoke thinking it was a normal day. In New York City they headed to work in the World Trade Towers. In Boston, Newark, and D.C., they rushed off to the airport to catch the early morning flight to San Francisco. In New York, firefighters and police officers – men and women -- kissed their spouses or partners goodbye as they left for the station. They all had their plans for the day: their meetings, who they would see at lunch, friends, appointments, errands with children. The world they imagined that morning, like the life they imagined, was one filled with many more days and years. They assumed life in all its fullness, whatever that life was. The ideals they held, the religion they practiced, the people they chose as their friends, their political views, the words they chose to say.

We don't refer to these things usually as "freedom of religion," "freedom of speech," "freedom of association," "equality," or "liberty." We just call it living. We call it life. And likely so did the people on that day too.

But that casual belief changed on September 11. These men and women -- sons, daughters, fathers, mothers -- were killed that day for simply living as they did, and where they did. People from over 90 nations were killed because they chose to live in a land that celebrated these values.

For those of us who survived, it was also a day we never imagined. Wherever we were, in countries around the world, we imagined a normal day as well. None of us expected the world to stop, and for us to watch in horror as people – people like us – perished before our very eyes, in flames, and ash, and rubble.

Faced suddenly with a world that we'd never imagined, the stark question for each of us to answer was this: "what do we do now?"

If people like us were going to be killed for living as we did, what would we do now?

One of the people asking this question was my college roommate, Jeff Thompson. Jeff and his girlfriend lived in New York, where he worked in finance and also sometimes went on the road to play with his band.

On September 11, he was at work, on one of the top floors of the Second World Trade tower, when the first plane hit Tower One. Seeing the destruction next door, he started downstairs, but no one followed. He was halfway down, when the second plane hit – above him – cutting off all of his colleagues; everyone he knew from work. The stairwells filled with people as they marched down to get out of the building, while



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firefighters and police struggled to get up. Jeff was barely out of the tower when it all collapsed behind him. He was covered in dust, and blood, and tears.

There were no phones. No cars. No way to get back home to his flat except to walk. And so he walked. He walked 18 miles, back to his apartment. When he arrived his girlfriend was home mourning his death. And when she opened the door, Jeff – covered in dust – looked like a ghost. They stood crying at one another. And then, he dropped to one knee and he asked her to marry him.

That is how he answered the question, “what do you do now?”

In the days and years since, they have married. They have a son. Jeff has left the glamorous lifestyle of high finance and show business, for a quiet life in a small town, where he teaches math. He has committed to the things that matter most to him: his wife, his child, his community, and to educating the next generation. He can never make sense of that day, and he will never be able to accept why he was spared when so many other good people perished. But in the days and weeks that have followed he has rededicated himself to doing the things they might have done if they had lived: living a free and good life.

Each day since that terrible day offers each of us the chance to do good things that help others. In the face of the question of September 12 – what do I do now? There is no answer other than: I will be better.

In the 10 years since September 11, survivors of terrorism around the world have struggled just as Jeff has to understand what happened, and why, and how to stop it from happening again. Free people have come together from New York to Nairobi, Bali to Belfast, Mumbai to Manila, Lahore to London, and many other places and nations afflicted by terrorism. We have all been more careful at our borders. We have been more aware in our intelligence. We have been more aggressive in our response to terror.

But we have been more than that. We have looked inward; and we have looked outward. We have been more inclusive of religions – learning each others traditions, hosting Iftars together, celebrating Ramadan and renewing our commitment to religious tolerance. We shared our thoughts and hopes and beliefs even more freely through our political processes. We innovated and built new ways to communicate -- social media -- that connected us to more people around the world than ever before in human history. We made more friends. And we invested more than ever in our alliances and in our communities around the world. We gave more aid. We supported more charities. We welcomed new Countries like South Sudan. And we celebrated the spirit of democracy among the people of Tunisia and other nations in this Arab Spring.



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We fought even harder against agents of hate, and fear, and intolerance wherever they lived. Tens of thousands of us have served this cause, often putting our lives at risk in difficult and dangerous places. We've lost some of our best and bravest men and women. And all of us have invested billions of dollars to save the world from killers like Osama Bin Laden, and those who followed his sick beliefs.

The terrorists wanted us to respond in terror – to be afraid to live as we had, and to believe as we did. In the 10 years that have followed, we have done just the opposite. We went back into our office buildings. We went back onto our airplanes. We came together in our temples, and churches, and Mosques. We lined up at our ballot boxes. We volunteered to serve our nations. And we gathered publicly without fear, whether to enjoy the simple pleasures of a football game, or a concert, or a barbeque. And we came together each year on this day to remember those who we lost, and to rededicate our lives in their memory.

Today members of the Embassy did not mourn. They went to the Arboretum and planted new trees to make the world cleaner and more beautiful. They ran around Lake Burley Griffin to raise money to help those suffering from heart disease. We joined with our Australian friends to volunteer at homeless shelters, and with organizations throughout this City to live the principles and freedoms we cherish.

Around the world, we resisted the natural instinct of people when attacked to withdraw and close off; our response has been to reach out and embrace.

Confronted with hate, we choose not to hate.

Confronted with death, we choose to live.

Confronted with fear, we choose to hope.

We have done, as Jeff did 10 years ago tonight. Faced with unimaginable fear and death, he kneeled to pledge his faith in love.

Thank you.



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Before we head home tonight, I offer some final words of appreciation, first from the President of the United States, and then from all of us.

First, from President Obama. The President has asked me to share the following letter that he delivered today to the Prime Minister.

Dear Prime Minister:

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, I want to take this opportunity to express our enduring appreciation for the close partnership and support we have received from Australia on that fateful day and in the decade since.

Australia's support on September 11, 2001, and in the days after was extraordinary. Prime Minister Howard was in Washington on September 11, preparing to address a Joint Session of Congress on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of our security alliance. While this address had to be postponed, his heartfelt words of support and sympathy on that day, and in the days and weeks that followed, eloquently described the depth of the United States-Australian partnership. Australia's quick declaration that these attacks were an assault on the values and freedoms shared by our two countries comforted us; your invocation of Article IV of the ANZUS Treaty strengthened our resolve to prevail over this menace. Americans were moved by the expressions of sympathy from so many Australian citizens, and we shared your grief at the loss of 11 Australians in the September 11 attacks.

In the decade since the attacks, we have had no more steadfast partner than Australia in our effort to defeat terrorists in Afghanistan, in Bali, in the Middle East, and in Southeast Asia. Australia's robust cooperation in these efforts has made a tremendous contribution to achieving the alliance goals we share, and has won the lasting affection and gratitude of Americans. As the United States and Australia stand on the cusp of our alliance's seventh decade, I assure you I will continue to do everything I can to work with you to deepen that partnership, to ensure security of our nations and our citizens, now and in the future.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama

President Obama nominated me on September 11 to serve in this post. On behalf of my family, I'm grateful that he has helped turn a date marked only by sadness for us into one that is also a day of hope, of resolve, and the chance to serve our nation.



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So on behalf of all of us, President Obama, Becky and I and our children and all of the People of the United States, we offer the following special thanks to our friends in Australia.

First, thank you, Prime Minister Gillard, for your inspiring and moving words. We thank you personally -- and we thank the government of Australia -- for your steadfast support, and for championing the values that keep us strong and free.

We thank the National Capital Authority for allowing us to gather at this beautiful location for our commemoration tonight. We are all privileged to be here among friends and among the flags that represent our many nations.

Thank you to our MC, Alex Sloan, for so skillfully leading us through today's event.

I thank Commissioner Crosweller, Cadet Bury, and the many first responders and volunteers who have joined us tonight. We thank you for coming, but even more, we thank you for choosing to devote your time and your energies to the service of others.

Thank you to the AFP flag party led by Sgt Dale DJC Cooper; Pipe Major, Commander Dina Kinsman and the AFP Pipe and Drums; and my good friends, Major Geoffrey Grey CSM and the Band of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, for your stirring performance.

Thank you again to our many other dignitaries here tonight.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to every person who came here tonight. Your presence honors those who perished, and those who have survived and served. But your presence is more than that; it is a statement of who we are. Those who perpetrated this crime hoped to destroy us where we are strong -- in our faith in one another, and in our belief that freedom and trust will ultimately make us all safer and stronger. By coming together tonight, we show that they have failed. We are not deterred. We are not terrorized and distrustful. We come together today, without fear. We stand here now openly, publicly, and proudly in full view; and we stand here together. This moment, for all of us, is a victory.

As we return to our homes for dinner tonight, let us try to remember this feeling of common purpose and work to pass on all that is precious in our lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, good night. Thank you for coming.